

## CHAPTER VIII.

## FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT.

SOME FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT NECESSARY.—SOME OPTIONAL.  
SOME GOVERNMENTS HAVE DISCHARGED USELESS, AND EVEN  
MISCHIEVOUS FUNCTIONS.—PERSECUTION.

The functions of government are those things which a government ought to do. Some are **necessary**—which private people could not do at all for themselves.

Some are what are called **optional** functions—useful things, which private persons or public companies might do, but which are probably better done, and more thoroughly done, when government undertakes them, on a large scale, and upon a uniform system.

Some are neither necessary nor useful, but **mischievous**—which neither private persons nor companies nor governments ought to do at all.

The **necessary** functions, or duties of government, are to defend the country against foreign enemies, and to keep peace in the country itself. It must seek out and punish evildoers who injure their neighbours in person or in property. It must provide courts of law, in which the disputes of its subjects may be decided and set at rest. In Australia, and in all countries where there are tracts of unsold land, it must survey these waste or Crown lands, and offer them in suitable blocks for sale, at such a price as will encourage industrious settlement; and it must give a satisfactory title to this land. It must also let to squatters, on fair terms, land on which to feed their flocks and herds.

The **optional** functions of government are to provide a good **currency**, or sterling money in gold and silver; to enforce a uniform system of weights and measures; to carry letters through the general post office; to

send messages through the telegraph wires; to keep up an observatory and meteorological stations to register weather reports and the rainfall; to take a census, or number the people, their sexes and employments, at stated times; to establish schools and universities; to construct and maintain the main roads and the railways; to make waterworks and reservoirs for water, and to bore for it in waterless country. There are many of these things which are very useful, and yet which no private person would care to undertake. For instance, it is a very good thing to have a census every five years, by which we learn how many people are in the colony, their ages, sexes, and religious denominations, and employments, how much land they cultivate, and how much stock they keep. If any ordinary person were to go about it, many would refuse to answer his questions, and think him impertinent and troublesome, whereas the government census-taker has authority to demand the information. It is printed and published afterwards for the benefit of every one who wants to know.

There have been many governments in the world which undertook things that were neither necessary nor useful in proportion to their cost. For instance, the great pyramid in Egypt, which employed a hundred thousand men for twenty years in building it, could never have been of much use, if it ever was of any use at all. It was not even beautiful, to delight the eyes of the builders, or of all the people who have lived since. The cathedral of Milan and Westminster Abbey cost a great deal of money and labor, but they have been worshipped in for hundreds of years, and are a pleasure to look at. The pyramid is only very huge and very strong, and was a very costly tomb for the king who built it.

Some governments have undertaken things not only useless, but mischievous. When the Spanish Government forbade the exporting of gold, when Spain had so much, they made the country poorer. When any

government tries to, by persecution, make all its subjects of one faith it does mischief, for it terrifies the timid into telling lies and acting lies, and punishes the bold for telling the truth.

There are some forms of persecution not so severe as others. For instance, to refuse a man the right of voting or sitting on a jury, or holding any office under government on account of his religious opinions, is not so cruel as burning him or imprisoning him; but all subjects who are peaceable and orderly should have the same rights. It is bad, both for the religion that is in favor and for the dissenters who are out of favor, to make these distinctions.

In South Australia the colonists have the fullest religious freedom. Everyone is allowed to worship God as he likes; and there is no State Church or particular denomination favored or maintained at the expense of the country. Men of all religions have the full rights of citizens.

INDIVIDUAL LIBERTY.—VARIOUS REGULATIONS MADE BY GOVERNMENT.—CARRIED OUT BY THE POLICE.—MANAGED BY BOARDS.—GOVERNMENT IS TO BE OBEYED.—GOVERNMENT IS TO BE CONTROLLED.

Some governments used to pass laws ordering what clothes the work-people and the farmers and the shopkeepers should wear, but this has gone quite out of fashion. It is generally understood that governments should not give orders as to what opinions their subjects should have, what church they should go to, what clothes they should wear, what books they should read, or what amusements they should indulge in.

The government allows every man to do as he pleases about these things, provided he does not prevent other people from doing as they please. This means, that if we do not injure or annoy our neighbours, we may do any foolish or odd thing we like with our own property. A man building on his own ground may put up a good house or a bad one, a

beautiful one or an ugly one. But he must not send a dirty drain through his neighbour's property, or shut up his neighbour's right-of-way. A man may read a bad book in his own house, but he must not display indecent pictures in a shop window. He may believe what he likes, and fancy his neighbour's belief to be all wrong, but he must not go into his neighbour's house and make fun of his faith, or disturb his public or private worship in any way. Whenever our bad conduct directly injures our neighbours, or offends public decency, it is liable to punishment; but when it only injures ourselves, government does not interfere.

In a great variety of matters, the police, who are the servants of the government, interfere for the sake of the public good. Sometimes this interference is direct, and sometimes it is done through corporation officers or boards of management supported by the police. The police have the right to go into public-houses, and report on the way in which they are conducted. Properly constituted government authorities can seize and destroy unwholesome food and drink exposed for sale, and make the sellers pay a fine. They inspect weights and measures, and punish those who use false ones to give their customers less than they pay for. They can prevent people from overcrowding omnibuses or lodging-houses. They can order houses unfit to live in to be pulled down. They can fine people for having collections of filth on their premises, or foul drains, which endanger the public health. They compel everybody to be vaccinated, for fear of small-pox. They send a medical man to every ship that arrives, to prevent people from landing if there is any infectious disease on board. They regulate the sale of poisons. They require all births, deaths, and marriages to be registered, and the cause of death to be specified. They hold what is called **coroner's inquests**, to inquire into any case of sudden death. They hold inquests or **courts of inquiry** as to the cause of fires, whether it is wilful or accidental. They require all

banks and joint stock companies to publish correct statements of their affairs, and of the business they do for the benefit of the public.

Some of these functions are done by the police, some by officers appointed for the purpose by the government, and for some the government appoint boards of management. These boards are composed of gentlemen likely to understand the particular business. There is a Board of Health, employing sanitary inspectors to find out and cause to be destroyed what may cause disease. There is a Forest board, for the preservation of the forests of South Australia; a Marine board, for the settlement of shipping disputes and the improvement of ports and harbors; a Destitute board, for the relief of the poor; Road boards, Hospital boards, Institute board, and Botanic Garden board. All these boards have their authority from the government, and report all that they do, once a year, to the minister at the head of the department to which they belong. Their most important business is reported in the newspapers, so that people can always know what they are doing. They must keep correct accounts of all the money they receive and all money they spend, and have their accounts **audited**, that is, certified as correct by the government auditor, as your teacher checks your sums.

If you have understood what was said in the last chapter about the government being both the ruler of the people and the servant of the people, you will see that as our ruler **it must be obeyed**, and as our servant **it must be watched and checked**. This is especially necessary in a colony like this, where the **optional duties of government are so many** and so various. Every man of twenty-one, who has a vote, has a voice in regulating public affairs and public expenditure. He ought to consider whether these optional functions are wisely undertaken, and he ought to see whether the management of these things is good, and not too expensive.